

## Artículo de investigación

**Moscow youth non-governmental organizations as a youth behavior regulator****Молодежные общественные объединения Москвы как регулятор поведения молодежи**

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**Abstract**

The Russian youth of today are inhomogeneous in terms of their composition, deeply polarized as to their social, national and ethnic characteristics and have unequal opportunities for starting their lives and careers. The objective of this research is to identify the preventive influence of youth non-governmental organizations on the illegal activities of students and reduction of the manifestations of destructive behavior patterns.

The obtained results have shown that the general mood of participants of youth non-governmental organizations consists in preservation of the identity of each non-governmental organization, defining it as a unique establishment with its own elaborated solutions and effectiveness. It has been found that the main focus areas of Moscow youth non-governmental organizations are very diverse and embrace nearly all spheres of social life.

**Keywords:** Young people, youth non-governmental organizations, social portrait of young people, behavior of young people, social demand.

**Аннотация**

Современная российская молодежь неоднородна по своему составу, глубоко поляризована по своим социальным, национальным и этническим характеристикам и имеет неравные возможности для начала своей жизни и карьеры. Целью данного исследования является выявление профилактического влияния молодежных неправительственных организаций на незаконную деятельность студентов и уменьшение проявлений деструктивных моделей поведения.

Полученные результаты показали, что общее настроение участников молодежных неправительственных организаций заключается в сохранении идентичности каждой неправительственной организации, определяя ее как уникальное учреждение со своими разработанными решениями и эффективностью. Выявлено, что основные направления деятельности московских молодежных неправительственных организаций очень разнообразны и охватывают практически все сферы общественной жизни.

**Ключевые слова:** молодежь, молодежные общественные организации, социальный портрет молодежи, поведение молодежи, социальный спрос.

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## Introduction

In the era of social transformations and global processes, any development of society can be objectively dangerous in terms of scientific and technological progress, dysfunction and transformation of various social institutions, making a transition to the phase of “risk society”, which unavoidably faces problems in the security system, including social security (Beck, 1994). In the context of the situation in Russia, there is a relative growth of reflexivity in society expressed in the problematization of its self-preservation and reproduction, when one may talk of a crisis of normative ideals and the social project of the future (Yanitskii, 2003). In these conditions, it is necessary not only to update the search for mechanisms for stable and secure social development but also effectively solve the current problems connected with prevention of engagement of young people in illegal activities. This task, being the key element of social stability and security in Russia, is one of the priorities in the sphere of implementation of the state youth policy.

The Russian youth of today, as an active part of the society, a carrier of consistency and variability of society, turned out to be extremely differentiated. They are guided by different orientations – towards the traditional folk culture, East or West, religious aspects, or the economic situation, which makes young people especially vulnerable. We agree with the Russian researcher S.O. Elishev, who points out the negative impact of the manipulative influence on socialization and upbringing of young people: “In this case, it entails, for instance, various revolutionary upheavals and mass protests, where young people as victims of a manipulative process often take a most active part without realizing their true role. The described situation leads to a significant social problem, which raises serious concerns in Russian society” (Elishev, 2018).

Many Russian and foreign researchers emphasize the necessity of studying youth non-governmental organizations from different perspectives. For example, S.Ts. Khobrakov views youth non-governmental organizations as an institution of political participation in the life of modern Russia (Khobrakov, 2009). Research into the evolution and development of youth organizations is presented in the monograph by T.E. Petrova, V.G. Novikov and V.V. Feshchenko (Novikov et al., 2001). S.O. Elishev wrote a comprehensive work on the issues of manipulation, including those in youth organizations (Elishev, 2018). A.M. Egorychev

and L.V. Mardakhaev focus on professional youth communities, considering integration of national and international components to be an essential way of self-fulfillment of young people. Articles by T.K. Rostovskaya and E.A. Knyazkova look at the issues of social security of young people (Rostovskaya, 2019a; 2019b). A.M. Mityaeva and S.N. Fomina analyze the interaction between young people in non-governmental organizations and make conclusions about their importance for self-fulfillment of young people (Mityaeva et al., 2016). Works of foreign authors looking at the role and significance of youth organizations in Russia focus predominantly on political activity of young people. For instance, T. Frye, who analyzes elections, protest and confidence in the Government of the Russian Federation, pays attention to participation of youth organizations in political processes (Frye, 2019). Russian scientists who explore the issues of the state youth policy and the impact of participation of young people in non-governmental organizations as a tool of their socialization point out the necessity of developing new forms and methods of engaging youth in positive social activity (Chuprov, Zubok, Uilyams, 2003; Rostovskaya, 2017a, 2017b). In this context the problem of destructive behavior demonstrated by students in modern Russian society causes special concern.

Thus, having analyzed scientific sources, we put forward a hypothesis of this research suggesting that the potential of youth non-governmental organizations in the sphere of prevention of destructive behavior among young people can be developed by upgrading their status as organizations socially significant for the state, set up a centralized funding system and establish a unified system of youth organizations managed by a coordinating body.

## Methods

Theoretical and methodological substantiation and implementation of the research program are based on a systemic and integral vision of participation of young people in youth non-governmental organizations. The research into the current state and development prospects for Moscow youth non-governmental organizations involved the following:

- 1) A survey of 1,000 respondents (students residing in Moscow and participating in Moscow youth non-governmental

- organizations). The survey was conducted as a structured interview;
- 2) An expert survey of organizers of youth non-governmental organizations. Fifty-eight experts took part in the survey carried out in the form of a structured interview;
  - 3) Four focus groups with experts, heads and members of youth non-governmental organizations.

Questions for the formalized interviews were developed including the following blocks: for young people (members and experts (employees) of youth non-governmental organizations) and for parents of young people participating in such organizations.

## Results

Youth non-governmental organizations in modern Russia are a social phenomenon that has not been thoroughly studied yet. Establishment of the association of non-governmental organizations The National Council of Children's and Youth Organizations of Russia in 1992 is considered to be the common start of the children's and youth movements in Russia. The mission of the National Council is to coordinate children's and youth organizations in Russia in order to protect and promote their interests and enforce the rights of young people and children. The National Council is comprised of 72 collective members. In 2001, an all-Russian association of non-governmental organizations the Union of Youth Organizations of the Russian Federation was established. In 2006, the Youth Public Chamber of Russia was created. Its main tasks are to prepare a candidate pool for government agencies and make suggestions regarding development of the state youth policy. The mission of the Youth Public Chamber is to unite young leaders aged from 18 to 35. Among the members of the Youth Public Chamber are representatives of such youth organizations and political movements as the Youth Union of Right Forces, the Student Initiative Support Center, the Active Youth Union, the Union of Young Scientists, the Youth Center of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the Young Guard of United Russia, etc.

A distinctive feature of the modern development of youth social movement is the fact that future members join such organizations on a voluntary basis. This condition must remain an indisputable norm of their activity. However, at this stage, the freedom of choosing an organization is manifested for most young people as the freedom

not to choose any of them, which hinders the dialogue between the government and social institutions, on the one hand, and the growing generation, on the other hand. Only a few youth organizations provide for mass membership of young people.

Having analyzed the main focus areas of Moscow youth non-governmental organizations, we found that they are very diverse and embrace nearly all spheres of social life. Within the limits of the city there are organizations that focus on development of political activity of young people and engaging them in lawmaking. Organizations dealing with religious upbringing ("Resurrection", "The Union of Muslim Youth", etc.) based on religious foundation are becoming more popular. The most numerous social organizations are those working in the sphere of leisure activities, such as sports, art and creative activities that help to develop young people's talents in various areas. Charity work conducted by youth organizations, which involves young people in diverse social practices, is rapidly developing in Moscow. State support of youth organizations is expressed primarily in the form of grants. The grant system allows youth organizations to receive funding for their projects and hold a large number of social events.

In order to identify the reasons and goals of young people's participation in youth non-governmental organizations, we conducted interviews on the topic. First of all, the respondents were asked the question "What do you think you need to live well?"

No differences were identified in terms of the gender aspect. According to the obtained responses, the majority of the respondents rate the standard of living of their families as sufficient or good. The respondents dream about a "diploma, education certificate" (62.7% of the respondents) or "money" (36.4%). At the same time 11.8% of the respondents think that they have all the things needed and chose the option "there are no such things". Analyzing the answers in terms of categorizing them into material and non-material assets, it should be noted that the value of "education" in the sense of a supporting document was mentioned as a priority. Education is followed by purely material values, such as "money", "trendy clothes", "gadgets", etc., with a big gap.

As far as gender distribution of the responses is concerned, girls tend to seek for spiritual values, so they chose such options as "books" more often than boys (11.0% of female respondents versus

9.6% of male respondents) and “musical instruments” (20.4% and 12.1% respectively), while boys, on the contrary, tend to value material well-being, so the option “money” was much more significant for them than for girls (43.9% of male respondents versus 29.8% of female respondents).

Indicating the things necessary for “a good life”, respondents did not stick to any dominant answers, and their opinions divided between such

options as “money”, “education”, “friends”, etc. The least popular options among the respondents were the following: “support from parents” and “social stability”. The respondents showed their identification with a primary social group — their circle of friends — as the most significant social group at their age and the search for their own selves; they also mentioned the importance of “education” for further progress in life, as well as the significance of material well-being (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Things necessary for “a good life”, according to the respondents (options, %)

What do you think you need to live well?	%
money	15.9
friends	13.7
nothing	15.6
education	24.0
family	10.9
support from parents	1.6
social stability	1.2

The prevailing options indicated by the respondents when asked about the prerequisites of “a good life” for their parents are “happiness of their children”, “children’s obedience” and “health of the family members”. The respondents are aware of their own significance for their parents, which testifies that in these families, parents pay attention to their children’s achievements and development, but does not imply the presence of close family ties. As far the gender aspect is concerned, the answers submitted by male and female respondents are very similar with one exception — the option

“my happiness”. This response is more of a priority for girls than for boys (29.9% of female respondents versus 15.3% of male respondents), which can be explained by differences in parents’ attitudes and their higher concern for their daughters than for sons, the latter given more opportunities for self-fulfillment.

We asked the respondents a question about the influence of agents of socialization on the development of young people and obtained data showing that this issue is very important for youth.

**Table 2.** Respondents’ opinions about the impact of agents of socialization on their development (most common answers, %)

Who influences your development the most?	%
parents	83.1
friends	55.1
teachers	36.2
relatives	28.0

Among the main agents that have influenced their development, the respondents indicated: “parents”, “friends”, “teachers” and “relatives”, the first option evidently being dominant (Table 2). Significant dynamics of the importance of the key agents of socialization influencing teenagers’ personality development can be observed. The

gender differences in this aspect show that girls generally tend to be guided by social agents beyond their primary social group (family) as role models in the course of development of their personal identity, while boys consider parents and relatives to be the most important people in terms of their personal development.

**Table 3.** Respondents' opinions about their role models (most common answers, %)

Who do you want to be like in the future?	%
myself	41.9
parents	30.5
famous people and business leaders	55.9

In spite of the significance of parents in their social development, their care and attention to their children, the respondents look for independence in the sphere of self-identification, so when asked, "Who do you want to be like in the future?", the majority of them answered "myself" (40.3% of the respondents).

Conditions of socialization and the age of the respondents have largely predetermined their social portrait. The period of primary socialization laid the groundwork for further development of young people. Growing in well-to-do families surrounded by thoughtful parents has determined life orientations of the respondents. They aim for active interaction with peers and try to find their true self and manifest it. In terms of the gender aspect, it can be noted that girls show higher aspiration for independence, which is expressed in their wish to find their own identity and model their behavior after famous and popular people. The boys that took part in the survey demonstrated higher significance of family in their lives indicating "parents" as the main institution of their socialization and the role model.

The next essential task of this research was to compile a social portrait of an employee of a youth non-governmental organization.

In terms of gender and age characteristics, employees of youth non-governmental organizations are predominantly women aged from 18 to 28.

Their educational level is also partly predetermined by their age: it is either "incomplete higher education" (23.7% of the respondents) or "higher education (64.5%)". About 60% of the employees (experts) have families and nearly a third of the respondents have children. Among the main criteria of "a good life" the experts mentioned the following: "loving and being loved", "being healthy", "having friends", "having a good family and children", etc. (Table 4). Although the dominant criteria contain socially significant values, the option "taking care of others first, and then of yourself" is not prevailing. Its high frequency at the first stage of monitoring was due to a large number of the respondents from older age groups. Nearly a third of the experts mentioned the need to be independent and free.

**Table 4.** Criteria of "a good life" according to the experts (most common answers, %)

What does "living a good life" mean to you?	%
being financially secure	57.9
having a good job	47.4
having a good family and children	63.2
loving and being loved	78.9
being healthy	78.9
having friends	68.4
taking care of others first and then of yourself	15.8
having a good education	21.1
being independent and free	36.8

The social portrait of the experts is represented by two dominant types. The first type is a group of young energetic people who aim for self-fulfillment and social recognition. They have already received higher education or are studying at higher education institutions. This group shows commitment to social values and chooses its social circle in the environment of propagandized social individualism; it gravitates

towards close interaction with primary social groups. The second type is a group of older people with higher education who are often single, but have children. They want to be needed by society, at least in a small social group, so they devote themselves to helping other people.



In order to study the attitudes of parents to the participation of their children in youth non-governmental organizations, we asked them if they approve of such activities or are against them. The survey results show parents' unconditional approval of their children's participation in such organizations.

As a rule, parents view youth non-governmental organizations as communities that encourage their children to acquire new positive qualities. Communication with peers engaged in interesting tasks stimulates members of such organizations to adopt these behavior patterns and the social experience reproduced within this community.

During the interviews, parents pointed out that as a result of participation in youth non-governmental organizations, their children

became more organized, responsible, disciplined, patriotic and kind.

According to the respondents, the motives behind their children's joining non-governmental organizations are primarily connected with their interest in the activities conducted by such organizations and the communities developed within them.

An important part of the research was the identification of the attitude of the state to activities carried out by youth organizations. Formation of the state social demand for such activities is predetermined by the interests of young people, their parents' attitude to such organizations, perception of such activities by society, their positioning by youth non-governmental organizations and appraisal by state authorities.

**Table 5.** Reasons for respondents' membership in non-governmental organizations (most common answers, %)

<b>You remain a member of a non-governmental organization because...</b>	<b>%</b>
I can learn things that are necessary and useful for me	45.6
there are people I like among other members	45.6
I can have fun and relax	39.0
I can do useful things for other people and society	32.1
I can find understanding and support	43.5

The reasons for being a member of a non-governmental organization are not clearly defined in the respondents' minds and are distributed among the following areas: "I can learn what is necessary and useful for me"; "There are people I like"; "I can have fun and relax" (Table 5). In this connection, the activities conducted by youth non-governmental organizations can be compared with those carried out by leisure centers, hobby and sports clubs, etc. The respondents see the opportunity to benefit other people and spend their free time as

the main objectives of their participation in non-governmental organizations (Table 6). The wish to be useful to society through participation in youth non-governmental organizations is demonstrated predominantly by girls (57.5% of female respondents chose the option "to be useful to others" as their main objective of being a member of such organizations). Boys view non-governmental organizations as an opportunity "to do something in free time" and "to socialize with friends" (41.4% and 39.3% of the male respondents respectively).

**Table 6.** The main objectives of respondents' participation in a non-governmental organization (most common answers, %)

<b>What is your main purpose of participation in a non-governmental organization?</b>	<b>%</b>
to be useful to others	47.6
to do something in my free time	35.4
to socialize with friends	37.3
it will help me to enter a higher education institution	23.2

It should be mentioned that 88% of the respondents believe that participation in non-governmental organizations makes them “better” (Table 7). According to their responses, it is reflected in the fact that it is easier for them to

communicate with others, they become more disciplined, their self-esteem grows and their personalities become more interesting for other people.

**Table 7.** The main areas of self-improvement as a result of respondents’ participation in non-governmental organizations (most common answers, %)

<b>Does membership in a non-governmental organization help you to become better? If yes, how?</b>	<b>%</b>
it is easier to communicate with others	52.0
I’ve become more disciplined	46.2
my personality is now more interesting for others	16.1
my self-esteem has grown	18.3

Practical implementation of the social demand is determined by the necessity for non-governmental organizations as a means of socializing of young people, their engagement in active social life and an opportunity to spend free time in a circle of friends. Using the research results, it is possible to describe the most popular type of non-governmental organizations among modern young people, the characteristics of which are determined by their demand. The main propagandized focus areas of “a highly-demanded non-governmental organization” are the following: “provision of support to disadvantaged groups”, “development of personality and creativity”, “organization of clubs and round-table discussions to provide young people with an opportunity to communicate with each other and with interesting famous guests”. Therefore, the main purpose of a non-government organization is active adaptation of young people to social life and their personal self-fulfillment. The demand for non-governmental organizations shaped by young people has an impact on what such organizations have to offer.

## Discussion

The general mood of representatives of youth non-governmental organizations points to the necessity to develop an integral system with a centralized coordinating body providing completely transparent and publicly available information about the activities carried out by non-governmental organizations and events held. At the same time, virtually all of the interviewed representatives of non-governmental organizations want to preserve the identity of their non-governmental organization, defining it as a unique establishment with its own elaborated solutions and methods of working with children

and teenagers at the current stage of social development.

The research allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Young people take part in the activities conducted by non-governmental organizations. According to the respondents, the main reasons for their membership in non-governmental organizations are the following ones: “I can learn things that are necessary and useful for me”; “There are people I like”; “I can have fun and relax”.
2. The respondents believe that the main objectives of their participation in non-governmental organizations are “to be useful to others”, “to socialize with friends” and “to do something in free time”. When asked, “What do you do in the youth organization?”, teenagers answered: “I go hiking and travel”, “I do creative things”, “I organize different games for children”, etc.
3. Over half of the respondents said that they were ready to take part in good deeds free of charge. Specifically, they named the following possible altruistic deeds: “organizing different games for children”, “taking care of homeless animals”, “taking part in creating green spaces in the city”, “renovating playgrounds”, “taking care of the elderly, disabled children”, etc.
4. Two-thirds of the respondents believe that participation in non-governmental organizations allows them to engage in “good deeds”; a significant share of the respondents also emphasize the importance of communication both with

their peers and grown-up interesting people. Two-thirds of the respondents think that their membership in non-governmental organizations helps them to become better, namely “to become more disciplined”, “to learn something new”, “to have a good time”, “to interact with other people more easily”, etc.

5. Young people often join youth non-governmental organizations under the influence of primary social groups they are members of, such as friends or group mates. At the same time, the share of young people who have joined such organizations as a result of their parents' initiative is very low.

6. A common feature typical of members of youth non-governmental organizations is their orientation towards socially beneficial activities and predominantly activities based on ideological, moral and spiritual foundations. On the whole, the majority of respondents said that they were ready to take part in good deeds beneficial to society free of charge.

## Conclusion

At this stage of development, youth non-governmental organizations can be characterized as monopolized, diverse in terms of their focus areas (professional, creative, recreational, sports, environmental, military-patriotic, civic-military, charitable, etc.), with different forms and mechanisms of implemented programs and projects. Activities of most non-governmental organizations can be described as multidirectional. They include representatives of different social groups of teenagers and young people. Activities of the majority of organizations are oriented towards solving certain problems faced by society, children and youth. Many of them implement programs on establishment of social youth services and employment exchanges, development of youth entrepreneurship and sports, talent scouting and providing support to young gifted people, national and cultural restoration, organization of summer holidays, housing support, etc.

The conducted survey allows us to make a few suggestions aimed at the development of the potential of youth organizations through the prevention of destructive behavior among young people:

1. Identification and practical implementation of specific features

pertaining to corresponding spheres addressed by youth non-governmental organizations;

2. Establishment of an integral system of youth organizations with a coordinating body;
3. Promotion of awareness of organizations about events held and delivering joint events;
4. Upgrade of their status by positioning them as socially significant organizations by state authorities;
5. Creation of a system of centralized funding.

The social significance of these organizations is recognized by society. As opposed to informal communities (groups, gangs, etc.), in youth non-governmental organizations young people are provided with an opportunity to become subjects of the law and social activity.

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